

Thematic meeting at Gevgelija

Thematic meeting on the topic *Role, function and methods for establishing Commission for Inter-Community Relations* took place on 16th April, 2008 in Gevgelija. 23 participants, 11 representatives of NGOs and 12 representatives of local governments from Dojran, Valandovo and Gevgelija, attended the meeting. The aim was to acquaint the participants with the legislation, so that they can start the process for establishing Commission for Inter-Community Relations in their municipalities, which was identified as a need by representatives from Vlach, Turkish and Roma communities on the initial networking meeting in Gevgelija held in 2007. Facilitator of the meeting was Sreten Koceski, from *Institute for Community Development – Tetovo*.

The meeting started with presentation of the legal possibilities for establishing a Commission for Inter-Community Relations. This was explained by practical examples, discussions about establishing Commission followed. Following problems were identified on the meeting: poor communication between representatives of Turkish and Macedonian population in the region because Turkish population doesn't know Macedonian language, low level of education of Turkish children, poor infrastructure in area where Serbian population live, gender inequality within Turkish population, fear from free declaration of Roma and Vlach community because of the existing prejudices and stereotypes. Participants were divided in three groups, following their geographical distribution, and designed lobbying activities for establishing Commissions for inter-community relations in their Municipality. Following priorities were defined: introduction of Aromani (Vlachs) language as facultative one in primary schools (in Gevgelija); increasing the number of classes on Macedonian language (in Dojran); respect and promotion of ethnic minorities' culture, classes on languages of minorities groups; provision of finances for organization of cultural manifestation; equal representation of all minorities groups (in Valandovo).

As a result of the meeting in Gevgelija, the Association of Vlachs sent an official request for establishment of a Commission for Inter-Community Relations in Gevgelija. The Council of the Municipality decided to establish a Commission for inter-community relations, but it is not established yet. Establishment of the Commission for Inter-Community Relations was put on the agenda of the Valandovo Municipality Council and Council decided to establish the Commission. The request for establishing such Commission was sent to the Municipality of Dojran, as well.